

# ALGERIAN BERBER MUSIC

Edited and with notes by Rita Belateche

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THE BRIDE - The joys that await the groom who has not yet seen his bride.  
THE SAD EXILES - We lament our lot but endure.  
BROKEN HEARTED - Only I have no one on this day of rejoicing.  
ALONE - My love can never be mine.  
DEATH OF A HERO - Colonel Amiroche, our great champion, has been killed.

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Typical road near a Kabyle Village.

The Berbers represent one of the oldest North African civilizations. As mountain-dwellers of Morocco and Algeria, their way of life has undergone few changes since before the time the Romans invaded North Africa. Near the coast of Algeria, in the Constantine area, the Berbers live in a rugged mountainous region known as the Kabylia. The people, themselves, belong to the white race and are called Kabyls. They speak Kabyl, a Berber language, which is very old and thought by some scholars to belong to the same family of languages as ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.

To the Kabyl, poetry and music represent the highest form of art. Poetry and music have been kept alive for generations through an oral tradition since the language is not a written language.

Like much folk music, Kabyl folk music has come under modern influences which have brought many changes including new instruments and new musical styles. Originally, special songs were usually performed on occasions celebrating important events like birth, death, marriage, baptism and religious observances.

In Kabyl music, the women play a very important role and, according to tradition, gather together at times of feasting in the main room of the Berber house (every house has one very large room) to perform in chorus and solo. Each village has its professional poetess who improvises as she sings accompanied by the chorus of women. Sometimes one or two women play on small drums.

The men, on the other hand, do not participate in any organized musical activities. There are, however, professional male musicians and singers who travel from village to village. The ordinary man is limited to simple songs he sings or plays on the flute while working in the fields or tending his sheep and to military songs he learned as a soldier in the F. L. N.

Instruments used in Kabyl music: the shepherd's flute, the cornemuse (similar to bagpipes, a reed instrument to which is attached a bag made of animal skin), various kinds of percussion instruments, the "ghaita", a woodwind resembling the oboe in size and shape but cruder in form. Stringed instruments including the violin, guitar and banjo are now used because of other influences.

I should like to thank the members of the staff of the Algerian Radio System for the help they gave me in preparing the tapes.

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An itinerant group of Berber musicians participating at an open air festival in the City of Algiers.

#### SIDE A - Band 1

A song in celebration of the marriage feast. Such songs are usually sung by a chorus of women and a soloist who presents the theme. The chorus beats on small drums while it sings. Such songs are part of an ancient tradition. The singer improvises on the air she herself has composed in honor of the bride.

##### The Bride

I swear by all the saints of Sidi Aich  
That the man who wants to marry is in  
search of beauty.  
Tonight he shall meet the most beautiful  
daughter of our beautiful mountains.

I swear by all the saints of Sidi Hillel  
That the man who wants to marry is in  
search of gentleness.  
Tonight he shall discover the gentlest  
daughter - daughter of our valleys.

I swear by all the saints of Sidi Mansour  
That the man who wants to marry is in  
search of charm.  
Tonight he shall gaze into eyes even darker  
than our darkest grottoes.

I swear by the saints of Sidi Allal  
That the man who marries seeks pleasure.

Tonight he will fondle breasts firmer than  
the apples of our apple trees.

I swear by all the old cemeteries  
The man who wants to marry seeks grace.  
Tonight he shall enfold a slender waist more  
supple than our stalks of wheat.

#### Band 2.

This song originated in a place called Beni Ourlilane, a poor mountainous region. The only product it raises for export is its men, 80% of whom leave their country in order to earn a living elsewhere.

##### The Sad Exile

Who needs us, victims of unhappy circum-  
stances.  
Ah, if we only had good fortune, we'd be able  
to talk  
About wisdom and the art of living.

Oh, my brothers in exile, I have eaten but  
without pleasure.

Our world is built on courage and pride.  
Whatever you have my brothers, share it  
without regret.

As for me, I know my luck is bad.  
Because of it, I am always unclothed and  
unfed.

In spite of my unhappiness, I cannot forget  
anyone who may ask for aid.

I respect the property of others, the sacred  
property of others

Although many have let themselves be tempted,  
Who wants us, poor exiles, victims of so much  
suffering

Suffering of the body, suffering of the soul.

In spite of my unhappiness, I shall never steal.

In spite of my unhappiness, I shall never  
complain

Because in the book of fate all is clearly  
marked;

All has been foreseen since eternity began.

How many have borne without a note of bitter-  
ness,

How many of the men born of our mountains,  
An entire night and day are not enough to sum  
up

Their misfortunes and difficulties.

Still, oh, my brothers, strong sons of our dear  
mountains

With pride and courage you can bear your lot  
without complaint;

You can endure without tears.

#### Band 3

The religious holiday known as the Aid-  
Amezziane lasts for days and comes after the month



long period of fasting and self-denial known as the Ramadan. This particular holiday is characterized by abundance after the previous period of abstinence. It is also a time of pardon for wrong doing committed or harm suffered during the past year. In the streets, everyone, even strangers, exchanges warm greetings in the spirit of good fellowship and forgiveness.

This is the sweet sad song of a girl whose parents are dead and whose lover is far away. Only she seems to be all alone amidst the general rejoicing.

#### Brokenhearted

The time of Aid Amezziane has come;  
The time for the girls to bedeck their hands  
and feet with henna,  
To smile, to love.  
But here am I, oh, Lord, with rivers of tears  
down my cheeks.

The holiday has come;  
The time to visit, the time to forgive.  
But I have no one to visit, no one to visit me.  
For as you know, oh, my Lord,  
He whom I love has gone off  
In search of what destiny may bring him.

The time has come for the Aid-Amezziane;  
The time for the feast of hope has arrived.  
Ah, if only I had the wings of a bird,  
I'd fly away into the heavens.  
I'd fly away through the heavens to you,  
My beloved of whom I dream.  
But alas, how many mountains keep us apart!  
If there were only a river, I could cross it.  
If I were a bird, I could fly.  
The time has come for the Aid-Amezziane;  
The time has come for the feast of hope.

#### SIDE B - Band 1

A love song called "Alone". The Kabyl word for alone is Wahadi, the same as the Arabic. The young woman laments her loneliness.

Oh, mother, I am broken-hearted forever.  
Care for me, treat my wounds.  
You are the only doctor who can do this for me.

Oh, alone, alone with only loneliness as my  
companion,  
Because the one who loves me does not please  
you  
And the one I love doesn't love me.

Oh, mother, my legs are weak because of my  
grief.  
Care for me, console me.  
You are the only person who can do this.

Oh, alone, alone with only loneliness as my  
companion,  
Because the one who wants me you don't want  
And the one I want doesn't even know it.

Oh, mother how heavy is my heart.  
I feel myself suffocating.  
Oh, alone, alone, I'll grow old in my  
loneliness  
Because the one who loves me doesn't please  
you  
The one I love doesn't love me.

Oh, mother, into my cage a pigeon flew.  
I cared for him with love,  
Better than the way a doctor of Beni Yala  
could do.  
But the pigeon told me that my luck would fly  
away with him.

Alone, alone, loneliness is my companion,  
Nobody can ever cure me  
Because my luck is drowned in the waters of  
the sea,  
For my love is gone.  
He has left me alone with my memories.

Oh, mother, I am forever wounded in heart  
Because the one you want I don't want  
And the mother of the one I love doesn't like  
me.

Day after day, night after night  
I wait for the postman.  
But day after day, night after night,  
I hear the postman tell me  
There's nothing for you, oh, lonely one.  
And in my veins I can feel my loneliness make  
my blood stand still.

#### Band 2

#### The Death of a Hero, Colonel Amirouche

Colonel Amirouche remains the most admired military leader of the Algerian Revolution. He was in charge of the third military region (the Kabylia) from 1955 to 1958. He conducted a most challenging campaign against the French army. In spite of the thousands of well-equipped soldiers, an air force and a navy, the French who had surrounded and occupied the villages were unable to capture this popular leader. He left the Kabylia just once, only to meet his death. Called upon to participate in a meeting of the G. P. R. A. at Tunis he left to go over the mountains on foot. Near Bou Saada, on the road to Tunis, his small group of twenty men was spotted by French planes. A French regiment then surrounded the group and Amirouche died along with his companions after 48 hours of fighting. The news of his death spread over the world through newspapers and radio and was one of the outstanding events of the Algerian war.



The enemy killed him,  
The enemy has struck him down as traitor.  
He is dead, the great Amirouche;  
But in the hearts of his countrymen  
He remains alive for eternity.

France has packed her bags  
To leave the Djurdjura mountains  
Now that her soldiers have been killed.

The enemy has dealt us a heavy blow  
Because it has killed the lionhearted;  
It has struck down Amirouche,  
It has struck down Amirouche.

The road to Tunis is hard and long.  
I hate it as I hate the sharp taste of the rose  
laurel.  
When the news reached us,  
It was not good news.  
He is dead, our great Amirouche  
And our tears flow like rivers.  
Our hearts were broken  
By the attack on Amirouche.

The road to Bou Saada is hard and long.  
I hate it as a bitter drink.  
When the news reached us,  
It was during the month of Ramadan.  
It was the great Amirouche who died.  
Even our mountains are in mourning.

The enemy has dealt us hard blows  
Because it has killed the lion hearted.  
It has killed Amirouche,  
It has killed a million of our brothers.

The oath at Beni Oughlis  
By the heroes who inspire the sacred vow,  
Oh, sons of free Algeria,  
The moment of action has come.  
Oh,giants of our mountains,  
You from Michelet and from Akfadou,  
Arise, because  
The enemy has dealt us rough blows  
It has killed the lion hearted,  
It has struck down Amirouche,  
It has struck down a million of our brothers.

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